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A 'Smoking Gun' in Siberia?

Disregarding risks to next year's election campaign, President Reagan has quietly signaled national security adviser William Clark to damn the torpedoes and go full speed ahead in challenging the Soviet Union to explain apparent violations of nuclear treaties with the United States.

Not surprisingly, Reagan's admonition was music to Clark, whose ears are finely tuned to the question of the Soviet Union's playing fast and loose with the SALT treaties. Intimates say Clark has reluctantly concluded that evidence of a massive new Soviet radar—this one in central Siberia—looks like "smoking gun" evidence of Soviet cheating on the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty.

What surprised hard-line Reaganites was not Clark but the fact that Secretary of State George Shultz and Foggy Bottom's Soviet experts are also convinced that the long-suspected smoking gun may now be in hand. That ends more than three months of high-level vacillation on whether Reagan should risk going to the mat with the Russians on SALT violations. With Clark and Shultz—backed by the Pentagon and the CIA—now agreeing, only the politicians warn the president to go slow.

But warnings that taking the Kremlin to the woodshed could damage Reagan's political prospects by putting confrontation back in vogue cut little ice with the president. What the politicians have had in mind is continuation of the gradual—if meaningless—warming trend between Ronnie and Yuri to be followed by a Reagan-Andropov summit extravaganza sometime before midyear 1984.

That would finally remove the Ghengis Khan cloak draped over Reagan's shoulders in the 1980 campaign and replace it with the olive branch of peace. Reagan campaign strategists have been trying to advance that political scenario for months, led by White House deputy chief of staff Michael K. Deaver.

The latest fact to intrude on Deaver's dream of running Reagan for reelection as the peace candidate was the discovery by U.S. spy satellites of a major Soviet radar installation that is a clear violation of the ABM Treaty. The White

House was alerted July 15 with a cautiously worded statement from the intelligence community that the new radar base "appears to be inconsistent" with the treaty.

Far tougher language is used at high levels of the State Department to describe the new radar base, which resembles five others, including the battle-management radar covering Moscow. The Moscow radar is linked to a missile-defense system—the sole anti-missile system permitted by the ABM Treaty.

At State, officials make no pretense of underplaying the new radar. One top diplomat told us that the only question is whether the violation it represents is "pernicious" or something less. Except for the missile-defense system covering Moscow, the treaty permits only early-warning or tracking radars and requires them to be sited along the "periphery" of the Soviet Union.

The new Siberian radar station is aimed at the Pacific Coast facing Alaska, nearly 2,000 miles away, not at China, to the South. By itself, that is an airtight case of violating the ABM Treaty.

But the new radar also happens to be near several sites of intercontinental missiles. That suggests an intent to harness it to a missile defense system to protect those offensive missiles, a violation that would be clearly "pernicious."

As the new chairman of the president's top-level Arms Control Policy Group, the only interagency group he chairs, Clark will accept neither a "nyet" nor an undue delay from Moscow to the American request for an emergency U.S.-Soviet meeting. The United States wants to take up the radar question and other long-pending U.S. suspicions that the Russians are building new offensive missiles ruled out by SALT II.

Clark's impatience reflects the president's. Despite undercover planning for a pre-election summit, Reagan insists that the unresolved question of Soviet violations must be answered, whatever the impact on U.S.-Soviet cordiality. So long as Clark remains by his side, no one is likely to change his mind that the best 1984 politics is to tell the truth about Soviet deceit and let American voters make up their own minds.

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